A

LETTER

TO

WILLIAM BAKER, Esq.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

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FROM A

HERTFORDSHIRE FREEHOLDER.

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TO

WILLIAM BAKER, Esq.

FROM A

HERTFORDSHIRE FREEHOLDER.

SIR,

AS an Appeal is now made to the people of this country; and as their paſſions are attempted to be excited, in order to effect a plan of imaginary reformation; it behoves every well-wiſher to peace and order to exert his utmoſt endeavours to check the progreſs of diſ-

content. Upon this principle I now addreſs you; and, if an anonymous application be objected to, I ſhall vindicate the concealment of my name, by referring to the ſubject on which I write. The queſtion is of a public nature, and the merits of it depend not on the authority of thoſe who approve, or diſcountenance it.

Readily as I may admit, that the repreſentation of this country is not, in all reſpects, conformable with the original deſign of its inſtitution; yet as experience is always a ſurer ground to recur to than theory, I doubt the propriety of introducing new ſchemes of reform, when the kingdom has flouriſhed, and is flouriſhing under the ſyſtem by which it has long been governed.

The

The importance of every man to himſelf may lead him to cry out for the neceſſity of perſonal repreſentation; and many of your colleagues, of leſs pure principles than you poſſeſs, gladly lay hold of this ſelf-importance for the attainment of their pernicious deſigns. But it becomes you, Sir, who were ſo honourably appointed to your preſent ſtation in parliament; who have a character to maintain, and a very conſiderable intereſt in the welfare of the country; it becomes you ſeriouſly to reflect, whether you are likely to recommend yourſelf to the reſpectable and independent part of your conſtituents; or to ſecure the permanence of your own property, by the meaſure you now patronize. Why is the interference of the people to be ſolicited, when no other

cauſe of complaint ſubſiſts, than that they have not thoſe privileges which their neighbours in France have lately aſſumed? Is there any one ſubject of particular hardſhip that the common people are now expoſed to? Are their rights in any one inſtance invaded? Is commerce declining; or are labourers deſtitute of employment? If mankind then have reaſon to be contented and happy, what good purpoſe can be anſwered by deluding them with aſſurances, that their happineſs and intereſt may ſtill be more advanced by introducing a new ſyſtem, of which they know not the effects; and which may tend more to endanger, than to eſtabliſh the glory of an excellent conſtitution?

Had you, Sir, in your parliamentary capacity,

capacity, ſupported any ſcheme for a ſuppoſed amendment in the repreſentation of the Commons, you would, in that caſe, have acted conſiſtently with your former opinions; and I ſhould not have preſumed to condemn, though I might not have approved of, your conduct. But when you are induſtrious in diſſeminating diſſatisfaction in a country, which at no period was ever in a more reſpectable ſituation, you forget that a Britiſh ſenator ought to regard more the ſentiments of his countrymen, than to ſtrive to render their ſentiments entirely conformable with his own.

But the community, you will ſay, muſt be rouſed; and their paſſions muſt be ſtimulated, in order to make them feel their grievances. What, Sir, would you think

think of the phyſician, who would alarm an healthy patient, by talking to him of latent ills in his conſtitution, and adviſing him to purſue remedies, which he muſt admit to be dangerous, with a view of regaining a more perfect ſtate? If you would laugh at this counſel, where is the great difference between that medical and your political advice? Trade, manufactures, and agriculture, are now flouriſhing; and will theſe be in any degree promoted by an alteration in the repreſentation of the people? Will the huſbandman, or mechanic, get an encreaſe of wages, becauſe the privilege is imparted to him of voting for a member of parliament? Or will any of his real grievances be redreſſed, by creating five thouſand, inſtead of five hundred repreſentatives?

A nu-

A numerous aſſembly is commonly a tumultuous one; and if our parliaments are to be ſimilarly conſtituted with the National Aſſembly in France, we ſhall have too much reaſon to dread the ſame decline of trade, and the ſame diminution in our national ſplendour, which that country has already cauſe to deplore. The French have, indeed, emancipated themſelves from a ſubjection, of which we are happily ignorant; and their efforts to recover both liberty, and an equalization of the common burthens of ſociety, would have been univerſally applauded, if they had been ſatisfied with the acquirement of juſt rights. But when deſpotiſm is ſucceeded by the anarchy of extreme democracy; when the opulence and luſtre that are diffuſed by an hereditary nobility are exchanged for declining

commerce, falling manufactures, and impoveriſhed finances, where is the mighty value of the glorious renovation of the Gallic conſtitution? If the Britiſh ſenate is to be open equally to all men, regardleſs of any pecuniary qualifications, we ſhall ſoon find that property will be the object of envy, and ſubſequently of annihilation. And though *your* aim, and that of ſome others, may be merely to rectify the aſſerted injuries of a partial repreſentation; yet if, in correcting this ſuppoſed error, you deſtroy the balance that has long ſubſiſted between the different parts of our conſtitution, you will probably occaſion evils, neither ſeen nor meditated by men of your character, but which are the unqueſtionable intentions of ſome with whom you are now connected.

You

You will anſwer, perhaps, that when you ſee cauſe for danger, you will retract. But will not your own judicious obſervation, and your knowledge of hiſtory, ſuggeſt to you, that the moſt dangerous ſchemes have been promoted by a ſpecious zeal for liberty; and that the beſt-intentioned, nay, even ſome of the wiſeſt men, have been dupes to the crafty machinations of the clamourers for freedom? If the paſſions of the people are to be inflamed; if, when they are diſpoſed to be quiet, and have abundant cauſe to be ſo, they are to be told, that they have no conſtitution; that they ought to recur to the firſt principles of their government, and to aſſemble, as they heretofore did, when this country was in an infant ſtate, unconnected with foreign powers, and ignorant of every

branch of trade, but what related to the ſupply of perſonal wants; if ſuch be the topics to convey to the good people of Great Britain, we ſhall ſoon loſe our dignity, and our fame; and a worſe confuſion may be experienced, than that which Cromwell, and his adherents, introduced in the laſt century.

I am far from denying that the people have a right to ſtate their complaints. Privileges too that have been injuriouſly wreſted from them, they may laudably reclaim: but let their demands be conveyed with becoming deference to the legiſlature, which alone can properly remedy their evils.

Admitting that power is derived from the people, and that it is transferred for their

their uſe and benefit to ſelect bodies of men: yet if the ſociety to which power is delegated, has not palpably betrayed its truſt; if it conducts public matters with credit and ſucceſs; if it be mindful of general liberty, participating of the ſame burthens which are impoſed on the whole community, and claiming no other excluſive privileges for itſelf, than what are eſſentially neceſſary to ſecure freedom of debate, and of action; if ſuch be its conduct, what benefit can poſſibly be derived from harangues on the inherent corruptions of government? And how will the ſtate of the kingdom be rendered more proſperous, by ſubſtituting, for its preſent tranquillity, diſcontent; and by inculcating maxims of government, which are not only inconſiſtent with that policy which has hitherto aggrandized this

country, but which tend to make men preſumptuous, ſelf-willed, and diſobedient? But theſe apprehenſions you may deem groundleſs; and you may aſk, where can be the danger of attempting to remove corruptions, and to reſtore that primeval purity in the election of repreſentatives to parliament, which originally marked the public choice? If you had confined your efforts to their proper place of exertion, I have already obſerved, that your zeal could not have been the fair object of cenſure. But an appeal to the whole maſs of the community, an eagerneſs to impreſs on their minds a ſenſe of degradation in their civil capacities, and an endeavour to rouſe them to be active in the maintenance of fancied rights; theſe, Sir, are circumſtances of alarm to the quiet and peaceable ſubject, and have led

led many of your conſtituents to lament, that you ſhould have engaged in an undertaking ſo pregnant with danger and confuſion. Your experience muſt have informed you, that nice theories of government are not always to be carried into execution. Mankind, in mixed ſocieties, have been, and ever will be, ſubject to influence; and the attempt to remove it muſt be fruitleſs. The extirpation of corrupt influence can only be effected, by an attention to the morals of the people; and by convincing them, that while they are required to diſcharge the duties of their reſpective ſtations, their ſuperiors, who demand this diſcharge, are themſelves duly mindful of the obligations of virtue and religion.

I truſt then, that I ſhall not appear

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an advocate for corruption; though I deſpair to ſee the extinction of it. For when I obſerve, that in counties where the electors are numerous, the bulk of the people are as much ſwayed by the liberality of the candidate, as by any other parts of his character, I am confirmed in the opinion, that the common people are not likely to be guided in their choice of a repreſentative by the ſole conſideration of his merits. In thoſe borough towns, where the election is by no means confined to a few voters, what ſcenes of riot and debauchery preſent themſelves! and in the very city of Weſtminſter, where the qualification for voting is ſo generally diffuſed, what means have been recurred to, in order to ſecure ſucceſs! If government have had recourſe to undue influence,

the opponents to it have counteracted their exertions by meaſures not more juſtifiable; and if in ſuch a place as that, an election is rarely carried on without tumult and diſorder, is it to be ſuppoſed, that the common people in other parts of the kingdom will be more temperate; or more correct in their choice? The abuſe of a right principle does not, indeed, detract from its uſe; but when the abuſe is not only general, but ariſes from the prevalence of paſſions, which are invariably found to be operative, the correction of it is not likely to be effected by enlarging the opportunities of gratifying theſe paſſions. I do not wiſh to decry the good ſenſe, or the good qualities of the common people; but while they enjoy advantages that immediately belong to their ſtations in life; while they

they have no other cauſe for complaint, than what ariſes from neceſſary ſubordination; and whilſt a diverſion of their attention from the duties of their reſpective callings, to ſuch matters of civil polity as they are very incompetent to judge of, muſt tend to render them idle and turbulent; I ſee neither the wiſdom nor utility of invoking their aid to ſupport ideal plans of reformation.

Declamations on the corruptions of our parliaments have ſo long been uttered, that they would now be leſs regarded, if the utmoſt induſtry were not uſed to aggravate this ſuppoſed corruption, and to diſſeminate the belief of it throughout the kingdom. But allowing that parliaments are guided by the will of a miniſter, yet in what inſtance have they

they reſiſted the opinions of the people, when they have been fairly and diſpaſſionately avowed? Did Sir Robert Walpole perſiſt in his ſcheme for extending the exciſe laws, when it was generally condemned? and, though the propriety of this meaſure has ſince been juſtified, yet that miniſter, whom ſucceeding times have reſpected, but who, during his adminiſtration, was vilified as the engine of corruption, perſevered not in a plan that was offenſive to the public.

The naturalization of the Jews, however conſonant with modern and more improved notions of candour and benevolence, was relinquiſhed, on the principle of gratifying the wiſhes of the people. And, to come to more recent facts, was not the American war abandoned,

and the conductor of it compelled to reſign his office, when ruin was apprehended from a continuance of the conteſt? If it be ſaid, that the origin and protraction of this war are to be aſcribed to the influence of that very corruption, which you now ſeek to deſtroy, permit me to aſſert, that the commencement of the war was countenanced by general approbation. The nation reſented the ingratitude of ſubjects, who owed their proſperity to our foſtering and parental care; and though ſome individuals might foreſee the impolicy of contention, yet the juſtice of it was rarely queſtioned. So long as there was an hope of regaining lawful authority, the war was ſupported by a great majority of thoſe country gentlemen, who are elected by the freeholders at large: but

when there appeared no probability of a ſucceſsful termination of the purſuit, the alleged wiſhes of the crown, and the purſuits of its miniſter, were ſacrificed to the gratification of public opinion. Even the inſtance which you adduce of the Ruſſian war, is to me a convincing proof that the voice of the people is not likely to be long oppoſed; for though the policy of this meditated war was approved by a vote of the Houſe of Commons, yet when the meaſure was differently judged of by the community, the miniſter retracted, and deſerted the engagements into which he had entered. Whether he was right, or not, in forming theſe engagements, I do not now enquire; becauſe the queſtion before us reſts not on the expedience of a particular project, but on the powers that the people already

have to reſiſt any ill-concerted views of government. And if inſtances are exhibited of the actual poſſeſſion of ſuch powers; if a fortunate and ſucceſsful miniſter, in the very zenith of popular admiration, is driven to the neceſſity of forſaking alliances, and of receding from plans of his own formation; where is the proof that the voice of the public is, at preſent, too feeble to be liſtened to? or that it is likely to acquire ſtrength, by altering the channels of its communication? The miniſter, 'tis true, had obtained the approbation of the Houſe of Commons; and yet this vote was not in coincidence with the general ſentiments of the nation. But might not many members, without any ſuſpicion of venal controul, ſubmit their judgment, in a complicated matter of ſtate-policy, to the

the wiſdom of rulers in whom they confided? Might not the elevation of the Ruſſians, and the depreſſion of the Turks, be thought a ſubject worthy of the attention of this country? And though I, as an individual, may wholly concur with you in deprecating any other interference in that war, than by amicable negociation, yet do I not feel myſelf warranted to impute a different ſentiment to any venal influence whatſoever.

While therefore I ſee that the people retain in theſe days the full poſſeſſion of their rights; whilſt I cannot perceive that at any former period they were more attended to; or that their intereſts were more effectually ſecured, I can never admit the propriety of unſettling their minds by the addreſs that you, and your aſſociates, have lately made to them.

If

If France is to be holden forth as a pattern deſerving of imitation, let my countrymen fully weigh the good that is to accrue from following this model. The National Aſſembly is now open to men of almoſt any denomination, without regard to the attachments which property will naturally excite to the country wherein it is poſſeſſed; and which, in general, are the beſt ſecurity for the ſupport of ſalutary meaſures for the welfare of a kingdom. Diſtruſt and jealouſy characteriſe the leaders in this Aſſembly. Not content with the recovery of thoſe liberties, which they juſtly demanded, nor with the removal of that oppreſſion to which they had been injurioufly ſubjected, they now act as if royalty were ſynonimous with tyranny; and as if any reliance on, or any ſupport of public miniſters, were incompatible with freedom.

dom. Hence we ſee diſorder in their debates, and diſtraction in their counſels. Unconnected with any of the kingdoms of Europe, they hurl defiance on them all; and are provoking an hoſtile contention, when their armies are unacquainted with military ſubjection; when their fleets are not only in a ſimilar ſtate of diſobedience, but are actually decaying in their harbours; and when money, the reputed ſinews of war, is a commodity not eaſily to be collected. And is this a kingdom to be envied and imitated by Britons? Have *we* cauſe to complain of arbitrary impriſonment; of an exemption of any of the higher orders from the common burthens of ſociety; or of any evident deſign to abridge the liberties of the loweſt and meaneſt of our fellow-ſubjects? If no reaſonable ground for complaint

ſubſiſts,

ſubſiſts, why amuſe, and ultimately delude the people with projects of an encreaſe of happineſs? Why call for their intervention in points, of which very few of them have diſcernment enough to judge? Tell them to be ſober, induſtrious, and peaceable; urge them to reverence God, and to love their neighbours; and you will then take the beſt means of furthering their own happineſs, and of maintaining public proſperity. But if you wantonly ſolicit their cooperation in civil concerns, and deem them worthy to dictate to, and to direct a Britiſh ſenate; you will introduce a power, which, however right in ſome momentous points of interference, may ſoon become uncontrollable and irreſiſtible.

Amiable

Amiable as the humanity of this country has appeared, by its interpoſition in favour of the miſerably-depreſſed Africans, yet has it been ſuſpected by many, that the abolition of ſlavery was not the invariable object of benevolence. In your mind, and in that of the chief promoters of this abolition, I am confident that Chriſtian philanthropy was the great and leading principle that governed you. But many joined you, from a wiſh to catch at the opportunity of encreaſing the influence of the people, and with a view of aſſerting, that to their requiſitions the relief of the Africans is primarily to be attributed. Advertiſements have been circulated in news-papers, inſiſting on a compliance with the deſires of the people. The abettors of this

doctrine conclude, that if one purpoſe can be attained at the ſuppoſed inſtigation of the commonalty, a tranſition may eaſily thence be made to atchieve many other ſchemes of improvement.

Provincial meetings may hence reſemble the Jacobin clubs in France: and the inſtigators of faction, under the maſk of patriotic zeal, will be able, as they hope, to render themſelves of note, and of conſequence; and, having little property to loſe, they either foreſee the proſpect of acquiring pre-eminence by a change in the government; or they are conſcious that an alteration can be productive to them of no diminution either of fortune or character. But you, Sir, and ſome of your colleagues, have both at ſtake.

You have been ſelected by unbiaſſed voters; and your private virtues have as much promoted your advancement, as the knowledge of the vigour of your mind. Fulfil, then, the expectations of your conſtituents; and content yourſelf with the execution of thoſe powers which they have committed to you. Purſue in parliament whatever line of conduct you judge right; ſupport or oppoſe ſuch men and ſuch meaſures, as appear to you worthy of ſupport, or the contrary. But let not a predilection for any party, or any opinions, lead you to call in, unneceſſarily, a power, which, when once provoked to action, is not eaſily to be ſatisfied; which is ſoon ſubjected to the views of ambitious and deſigning men; and which, in the redreſs of fancied ills, is too apt to tranſgreſs

thoſe rules, by the obſervance of which, ſociety can alone be reſpected, be governed, or upholden.

I am, SIR,

With very ſincere reſpect,

Your faithful

and obedient ſervant,

A Hertfordſhire Freeholder.